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PROBLEMS OF CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND EDUCATION AMONG MID-CONTINENT MIGRANTS.

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THIS DOCUMENT PRESENTS THE RESULTS OF A 1957 SURVEY MADE IN SIX SPECIALLY CHOSEN SOUTHERN TEXAS CITIES, WHERE MIGRANTS WERE QUESTIONED REGARDING (1) FAMILY CHARACTERISTICS, INCLUDING MOVEMENT, EMPLOYMENT, EARNINGS THE PREVIOUS YEAR, FAMILY SIZE, AND CULTURAL BACKGROUND, AND (2) PROBLEMS CAUSING EDUCATIONAL DIFFICULTIES FOR THEIR CHILDREN. CURRENT TRENDS AND PROJECTS WHICH ARE HELPING TO ALLEVIATE SOME OF THE PROBLEMS ARE NAMED AND BRIEFLY DISCUSSED. THIS ARTICLE IS A REPRINT FROM "THE SOUTHWESTERN SOCIAL SCIENCE QUARTERLY," JUNE 1962. (EC)

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# Problems of Children, Youth, and Education among Mid-continent Migrants

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THE DEVELOPMENT of a migratory work force in agriculture in the United States has been a normal accompaniment of local specialization in crops with high seasonal labor requirements. Movement from harvest to harvest has permitted persons with few skills and limited employment opportunities to obtain their greatest monetary reward. On the other hand, community institutions and programs have been developed to meet the needs of a stationary population and are not readily adaptable to serve the needs of adults or children who move from place to place. School programs in particular are highly organized and not subject to adjustment to meet the needs of children in migrating families. Rough living conditions and lack of normal neighborhood and community ties reduce the standards of life of both adults and children and decrease their acceptability in normal community life.

The size of migratory family groups varies widely over the nation depending in part on their basic cultural background. The average size of the Negro households which constitute the bulk of the Atlantic Coast migratory movement is fewer than three persons (Table 1). The Spanish-Americans who move out of South Texas are usually in large family groups which average 6.5 persons. They have strong traditions of family responsibility which are basic in their system of morality. Migrant families of Spanish-

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Table 1.

Comparison of migratory households in the mid-continent and the Atlantic Coast streams.[1]

| Item | Mid-continent Migrants (1957) | Atlantic Coast Migrants (1953) |
|---|---|---|
| Households in sample | 446 | 673 |
| Persons in sample households | 2,905 | 1,866 |
| Persons per household | 6.5 | 2.8 |
| Persons who migrated | 2,569 | 1,676 |
| Workers | 1,334 | 1,285 |
| Nonworkers | 1,235 | 391 |
| Persons who stayed at home | 336 | 190 |
| School children, 10–17 years old | 281 | 89 |
| Non-school children, 10–19 years old | 188 | 34 |
| Percent workers, 10–25 years old | 47 | 32 |
| Ethnic origin | Spanish American | Negro |

[1] Data on mid-continent migrants from *Migratory Farm Workers in the Mid-continent Streams*, by William H. Metzler and Frederic O. Sargent (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, 1960). Data on Atlantic Coast migrants from *Migratory Farm Workers in the Atlantic Coast Stream*, by William H. Metzler (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, 1955).

American origin are now becoming the major element in the movement of workers along the Pacific Coast. They are just beginning to displace the Negroes along the Atlantic seaboard.

A survey was made in six cities in southern Texas in 1957, which were selected to provide a cross-section of the home-base area of migratory workers who move annually to harvest crops in a broad 34-state area. Reports were obtained from 446 households which contained 1334 migrant workers, 1235 members who migrated, and 336 members who remained at home. The field work was done during January and February, the time of year when most migratory families are back at their home base. The migrants were questioned in regard to their movement, employment, and earnings during the previous year.[2] The largest movement of the migrant families had been to cotton areas within the state, but large numbers also had gone to the Lake States canning crop areas and to the Rocky Mountain sugar beet and potato districts.

The families were classified into three groups according to range of movement. A scant third had worked in Texas only; they averaged 106 days away from the home base. A generous third worked in one or more states outside Texas, then returned home. They averaged 161 days away

[2] William H. Metzler and Frederic O. Sargent, *Migratory Farm Workers in the Mid-continent Streams* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Depart. of Agriculture, 1960).

from home. The third group worked outside the state during the spring and summer, then picked cotton in Texas before returning home. Their average trip away from home was 180 days.

*Characteristics of Migrant Families*

While the average household in the south Texas survey comprised 6.5 members, according to the Bureau of the Census, the median-size of family in the United States was 3.3 persons.[3] Data are not available to permit comparison of these families with nonmigrant households of Spanish extraction in the same area, but according to 1950 census data, average household size in Texas was close to that in the nation as a whole, 3.4 persons.[4] Migratory labor families in South Texas, however, are probably a somewhat distinct type. The fact that these families are unusually large had much to do with their migration. The wages of one worker were too meager to support a large family adequately, so the earnings of other members were added in order to meet its economic requirements. The average number of workers per household during the migration period was 3.0, or more than twice as many as reported doing work at the home base.

The decision to migrate when there are children of working age in the family is not entirely a matter of economics. An important precept in Latin-American culture is that parents should teach their children habits of work and industry rather than to permit them to loaf and become lazy. Hence, when a responsible parent is unable to find work for his children in the home community, he feels that it is better to go where there is work for them to do. From his family-centered viewpoint, he has difficulty in understanding why anyone should interfere in his effort to train his children to be self-supporting.

The migratory family faces the problem of what to do with children who are too young to work, and the usual solution is to take them along. This tendency was stronger among families who migrated only in Texas than with those who migrated to other states. Among the intrastate migrants, nonworkers were more numerous than workers.

Actually, the number of workers was somewhat larger than these figures would indicate. Only those persons 10 years old and over were questioned in regard to employment. Parents sometimes indicated that their children under 10 had been such good workers that they should have been included in the report. Such children are a source of pride to the Spanish-American family.

[3] U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Current Population Reports: Income of Families and Persons in the United States: 1956.* Series P-60, No. 27, April, 1958.

[4] U.S. Bureau of the Census, *U.S. Census of Population 1950.* Vol. II. *Characteristics of the Population.* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1952).

### *The Mother's Role in the Migrant Household*

Of the 1,334 migrant workers in the survey households, approximately half (49 percent) were household heads or their wives. Working wives, however, were only a little more than half as numerous as working husbands. Family custom among Spanish-American families calls for the wife to work along with the husband until she has borne him children to work by his side. After that, her place is in the home to take care of the family.[5] This custom is not strictly observed among migratory families, possibly because the mother's presence in the field is necessary in order to keep the younger members of the family at work. Approximately half of the wives worked during the period of migration. Very few of them worked at the home base. Ordinarily, the Spanish-American woman showed little enthusiasm for migratory work, but accepted it as part of her role as wife and mother.

### *Children and Youth Among Migrant Workers*

A fifth of the workers were schoolchildren at the time of the survey, and a third of the school youth who worked were under 14 years of age. Boys outnumbered girls by about 25 percent; some girls of school age migrated with the family but did not work. Girls often helped to take care of the children while the mothers worked. Interviews often indicated a tendency of girls to postpone getting into field work as long as they could.

The great importance of children and youth in migratory work is made apparent when their numbers are compared with the number of youth in the total labor force in Texas. Approximately 50 percent of all the migratory farm workers were under 24 years old. The corresponding proportion for all persons in the labor force in Texas is 24 percent.

A characteristic of South Texas migrants then is youth—large families of young children. Few older people continue to do this type of work.

### *Nationality of Mid-continent Migrants*

Approximately three-fourths of the migratory workers were natives of the United States; 72 percent were born in Texas and 2 percent in Michigan, Wisconsin, Colorado, or other work areas. A fourth were born in Mexico. Of the children, 86 percent were born in the United States.

Almost half the heads of households and a third of the wives were born across the border, as compared with only 14 percent of the children. Place

[5] Ruth D. Tuck, *Not with the Fist,* (New York, Harcourt Brace and Company, Inc. 1956). An excellent presentation of culture patterns of the Spanish-American in the United States.

of birth is significant in relation to the educational attainment of these people. School facilities had never been available to some of them.

### *Earnings of Migrant Families*

Most of these workers were employed in family groups, so data on household earnings may be more useful than those per individual worker. Average earnings of the families for 1956 were $2,208.[6]

The utility of large families is attested to in earnings per household according to number of workers. One-worker families had total earnings of only $1,218, a second worked added $514 to the family total, while a third boosted the family income to $2,537. Families with six, seven, or eight workers had average total earnings of around $4,000 or better. Families with difficulty in meeting expenses try hard to take advantage of such additions to their resources (Table 2).

Table 2.

Contribution of selected groups of family workers to the household income, Mid-continent migrants, 1956.[1]

| Group | Number in sample | Average number of days worked during the year 1956 | Average earnings during the year 1956 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Male heads | 410 | 174 | $1,145 |
| Wives | 205 | 89 | 528 |
| School children | 281 | 81 | 402 |
| Nonschool children | 188 | 141 | 808 |
| Household | 446 | ..... | $2,208 |

[1] Source: *Migratory Farm Workers in the Mid-continent Streams,* by William H. Metzler and Frederic O. Sargent, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, 1960.

### *Education of Migrant Youth*

Lack of educational opportunities for migrating children is one of the most unfortunate aspects of the migratory labor situation. Of necessity, educational programs are highly organized, and children who are irregular in attendance have little opportunity to get any great advantage from them. Consequently, even when they are able to attend, the children of migratory workers may be kept occupied with a little singing, drawing, and clay modeling instead of being allowed to hamper the regular classes in school.[7]

[6] William H. Metzler, and Frederic O. Sargent, *Incomes of Migratory Agricultural Workers,* (Texas Agricultural Experiment Station, Bulletin 950, March, 1960).

[7] Lois Phillips Hudson, "Children of the Harvest." *The Reporter,* (Vol. 19, No. 6, October, 1958). An account of the childhood experiences of the author as a migratory worker with particular emphasis on education. For reasons for this type of curriculum see *The Education of the Migrant Child* (Salem, Oregon: State Bureau of Labor, 1958), *The Fort Lupton Migrant School* (Weld County, Colorado: Ft. Lupton Consolidated Schools, 1958).

Spanish-American children have an added handicap in that ordinarily they have only a limited knowledge of the English language, while in the northern states, especially, teachers have little knowledge of Spanish. The children have virtually no chance to obtain an education until they have acquired the requisite command of English.

Migratory workers are also part of a highly organized system. When seasonal tasks are ready to be done, the migrants must be present in order to find employment. Toward the end of the work season, pressure is put on them to stay until all the crop is in. Ordinarily, this migratory sequence means removing their children from school before the school year is over in the spring and returning them to school from 1 to 3 months after the fall term has started.

While the average level of education varied with age, these facts about the migratory group as a whole stand out: a third of them had had no formal schooling and only five percent had any education above the grade-school level. The usual situation was that the younger workers had from 3 to 6 years of schooling, and the older workers no schooling at all. Migrant schoolchildren can expect very little educational assistance from their parents. In fact, very few parents can understand the value of an education.

A measure of the educational retardation that exists among the youth of this group can be obtained by examining the schooling of the youth 14 to 16 years old. A pupil who starts to school at the age of 6 and advances a grade each year should be in the ninth grade at 14, in the tenth at 15, and in the eleventh at 16. Yet only four of the 214 migratory youth in the 14- to 16-year age-group were in grades 9 to 11. Practically 100 percent were retarded to some extent. In fact, 16 percent were from 1 to 2 years below their normal grade, 39 percent were from 3 to 4 years below their normal grade, 29 percent were from 5 to 6 years below their normal grade, and 14 percent were 8 years or more below their normal grade. Migration means irregular school attendance, retardation, and sacrifice of future prospects for present needs.

### *Conflict of Work With School Attendance*

Movement of workers away from the home base may occur in any month of the year. None of those in the sample group moved in December, but this type of movement can be expected to increase now that migration to Florida is becoming part of the Spanish-American migration pattern. Outward movement of migratory workers depends upon the timing and volume of seasonal operations and may vary from year to year. The data presented apply to the year 1956, and might vary from other seasons.

Taking the migratory group as a whole, the most common pattern was

for them to leave in May and return in November. At the extremes, a few families left home in January or February, 1956, and did not return until January, 1957, while a few others returned in the same month that they left.

Approximately 40 percent of the migrants left home in May and another 40 percent left from June until November. Around a fourth to a fifth had left before May.

How this works out for the children is evidenced by enrollment data from Crystal City. Total school enrollment there at the end of the first six weeks in the fall of 1956 was 1,400. By January 1957, it had risen to 2,670. Educators stated that only 10 percent of the children had been in school while away from home base.

The extent to which the work season of these people interferes with education of the children depends on their range of movement. Only one-fifth of the intrastate workers left before school was out in the spring, but 80 percent returned too late for the opening of school in the fall. Of the interstate migrants, two-thirds left before school was out, and 90 percent returned too late for the opening in the fall. Of the workers who migrated both in and out of the state, 80 percent left before school was out and practically none were back in time for the opening. Late enrollment in school means not only that the child misses that much school time, but also that it falls behind and is at a disadvantage during the remaining time in school. Apparently, the problem of educational opportunity for migrant youth involves interstate relationships that are difficult to administer.

As the heaviest demand for these workers is during the late fall, an early return to home base is difficult. Eventually, however, mechanization of the harvest in cotton, sugar beets, potatoes, and tomatoes could reverse this situation.

### *Family Composition and the Movement out of Migratory Farm Work*

The movement of Spanish-Americans out of farm labor into nonfarm employment is rapid both in the work areas and at the home base. As Spanish-American workers gain experience and skill along nonfarm lines, they gradually move into jobs that are too desirable to be vacated to someone else. Furthermore, their pay is sometimes sufficient so that work by all members of the family becomes unnecessary. Enforcement of child labor laws also reduces the economic possibilities of family employment.

The workers tended to migrate or to quit migrating as family groups rather than as individuals. Only 16 of 296 individuals who had quit did so without affecting the migration of the rest of the family group. These were largely individual sons or daughters who had married or struck out for themselves, but they also included a few ill or elderly persons.

A survey of ex-migrants in the sample areas pointed toward two types of families that drop out of the migrant stream. The first is the family that has lost some of its workers because they have left home or obtained local employment. The second is the family with so many small children that migration has become difficult or uneconomic. One third of the ex-migrant families were of the latter type.

The reasons given for not migrating show some change in the attitudes of Spanish-American workers. Approximately half of the families who reported that young children were involved in their decisions to quit specified that the children were schoolchildren rather than babes-in-arms. As recently as a decade or two ago, school attendance would not have been regarded as a reason for the family to stay at home. This change may be due entirely to compliance with child-labor and school-attendance laws, or it may show a growing realization of the value of an education.[8]

### *Policy Implications of Current Trends*

The very direct conflict between the economic and the educational needs of these families calls for considerate rather than arbitrary action. Families which lack funds to maintain adequate standards of living may feel that they need some help from their children. Yet, the value to these people of an education should not be underestimated. The rate at which migratory agricultural workers find better and steadier employment depends to a large extent upon their ability to speak English and upon their educational background. Retardation of Spanish-speaking children has prevented them from entering employment in a variety of jobs and occupations. This situation has been changing rapidly during the last score of years. Since World War II, almost all South Texas schools have been desegregated with reference to Spanish-speaking Texans; compulsory school-attendance laws have been enforced to a greater extent; and techniques have been worked out for eliminating retardation resulting from the language difficulty. In the future, a method of teaching basic English to Spanish-speaking pre-first graders probably will be incorporated into the Texas school system and will help eliminate the language handicap previously suffered by this sector of the population. As a result of these three changes—enforcement of school-attendance laws, better school opportunities and facilities, and improved teaching techniques—the Spanish-speaking people will be better prepared for jobs in all sectors of the economy. Improved education will lead in the direction of regular full-time jobs rather than to migratory work.

As a result of these educational changes, a higher value is now placed on

[8] Frederic O. Sargent, "Education of Children of Migratory Workers," *Texas Agricultural Progress,* Texas Agr. Expt. Sta., College Station (Vol. 4, No. 2, March, 1959).

school attendance by both school officials and parents. Greater diligence in enforcing school-attendance laws has resulted, but also many parents have come to realize what an education can do for their children. Some now leave their schoolchildren with relatives until the school term is over. Others postpone their departure or hasten their return in an effort to meet school requirements.

Data from Crystal City show the rapid increase in continuation of Spanish-American pupils in school in recent years. In 1930, there were only two Spanish-American students in the high school; in 1945, there were 35; and in 1957, there were 160.

The increase in schooling of the migratory workers is impressive. Of the 1,334 workers who reported in the survey, only 3 percent from 14 to 16 years of age had no schooling as compared with 16 percent of those from 20 to 24 and 68 percent of those 45 years old and over. Again, only 2 percent of the migrants 45 years old and over had finished grade school as compared with 56 percent of those 20 to 24 years old.

Recent reports from work areas indicate that school officials in these areas are also beginning to set up special educational programs to meet the problem of migrant education. The programs at Hollandale and Fisher, Minnesota and at Ft. Lupton, Wiggins, and Rocky Ford, Colorado have been outstanding.[9] They emphasize a special educational program during the summer that is geared to the special needs of the children enrolled. Stress is placed on skills that can be put to practical use, such as reading and writing, applied arithmetic, health care, home care, and physical education.[10]

Enforcement of school-attendance laws in some work areas has yielded excellent results. A report from Hollandale, Minnesota indicated that school attendance of migrant children there has been nearly 100 percent for the last three years.[11] Other areas also have found that it is not difficult to get the children of migrant workers enrolled in school if some time is taken to overcome the resistance of the parents. Yet the hard facts of the situation are probably as stated by the officials of the Crystal City school system—only 10 percent of the migrant pupils had any schooling during the time they were away from the home base.

The problems associated with migration are being alleviated by the

[9] See: *The Education of the Migrant Child,* (Salem, Oregon: State Commissioner of Labor, August, 1958); Alfred M. Potts, *The Colorado Program for the Education of Migrant Children,* (Denver, Colorado: State Department of Education, 1961).

[10] See: Neil W. Sherman and Alfred M. Potts (eds.), *Learning on the Move: A Guide for Migrant Education* (Denver, Colorado: State Department of Education, 1960), and *Teaching Children Who Move with the Crops; Fresno County Project* (Fresno, California: Fresno County Superintendent of Schools, 1955).

[11] *Minutes of Minnesota Farm and Migratory Labor Committee* (St. Paul: Nov., 1957).

following adjustments and programs: (1) permanent settlement of migratory workers in the work areas, which reduces both the number of migratory families and the labor surpluses at the home base during the winter; (2) development of Annual Worker Plans so as to correlate movement of the workers with local labor needs of the particular season;[12] (3) development of better day-care centers, summer schools, and other facilities to care for the children who accompany the workers; (4) more vigorous enforcement of school-attendance regulations to reduce the loss in educational advantages; and (5) more careful regulation of transportation, housing and sanitation, to bring the living and working conditions of these people more in line with the norms of American life.

Since a dependable seasonal work force is vital to the agriculture of the Mid-continent area, long-range policies are needed that will build up such a force without creating heavy social costs. The present system of seasonal labor is based on a migrant family supporting its children through child labor and the sacrifice of their educational opportunities. Preseason planning should eventually reduce the amount and range of migration needed to accomplish the seasonal tasks. A comprehensive program to reduce the movement of large families and to check on the timing of those who must migrate would be socially advantageous. School and employment officials should manifest a special interest in reducing the movement of these people. Special consideration could be shown them for local employment opportunities. Due attention to regularity of employment, competitive pay scales, and acceptable transportation and housing standards should build, rather than destroy, a sense of worth and a feeling of being a part of the large community.

[12] See: Don Larin "Annual Work Plans for Agricultural Migrants," *Employment Security Review,* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Dept. of Labor, March, 1953).

*Intergroup Works. op in Cleveland*

CLEVELAND—Western Reserve University will conduct a six-week workshop on intergroup relations June 18 through July 18, 1962, with support of the National Conference of Christians and Jews, Northern Ohio region. Headquarters of the workshop will be WRU's new Sociological Research building. Cleveland welfare and religious leaders will be visiting lecturers along with WRU faculty. The program is designed for social workers, teachers, community organization workers, ministers, police officials, hospital administrators, nurses, students in social science, and others seeking broader understanding of causes of intergroup conflicts and methods of dealing with these tensions.